

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 16118

GENEVA PASS TO SHEPARD LOWMAN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF
SUBJECT: UNHCRREGIONAL REP COMMENTS ON RTG REF POLICY

1. LESLIE A. GOODYEAR, UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR WESTERN SOUTH ASIA, CALLED ON THE AMBASSADOR JUNE 5. GOODYEAR SAID THAT THE INTENT OF THE CALL, IN VIEW OF THE AMBASSADOR'S UPCOMING DEPARTURE, WAS TO EXPRESS HIS THANKS FOR THE AMBASSADOR'S CONSTANT INTEREST IN, SUPPORT FOR, AND GUIDANCE ON REFUGEE MATTERS. GOODYEAR THEN GAVE AN UPBEAT READING ON THE CURRENT REFUGEE SITUATION IN THAILAND.

2. GOODYEAR SAID THAT, WITH ALL THE USUAL RESERVATIONS, THE THAI ATTITUDE TOWARD THE REFUGEE SITUATION IS MORE RELAXED THAN IT WAS SIX AND EVEN TWELVE MONTHS AGO. PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE MERELY BY GETTING BACK TO WHERE WE HAD BEEN A YEAR EARLIER. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE RTG HAD ABANDONED ITS NOVEMBER 15 EXCLUSIONARY POLICY, WHICH AFTER ALL HAD SERVED ITS PURPOSE OF BRINGING ABOUT AT LEAST A TEMPORARY DECREASE IN LAND
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ARRIVALS IN THAILAND.

3. GOODYEAR CONTINUED THAT RTG ATTITUDES TOWARD THE UNHCR HAD ALSO CHANGED. THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR NO LONGER REGARDS THE UNHCR AS AN INSTITUTION OUT SOLELY TO FIND FAULT WITH THAI HANDLING OF REFUGEES. THE RTG "REALIZES THAT IN OUR STRANGE WAY WE ARE TRYING TO HELP

THEM." RTG ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE MISSIONS OF PRIMARY RESETTLEMENT COUNTRIES HAVE ALSO CHANGED. THE RTG NOW BELIEVES THAT THESE MISSIONS ARE TRYING TO HELP THAILAND ALSO.

4. FINALLY, INTEGRATION (BY WHICH GOODYEAR MEANS LOCAL SETTLEMENT) HAS CEASED TO BE A DIRTY WORD WITH THE THAI. THEY ARE ACTIVELY PLANNING FOR IT.

5. GOODYEAR SAID THAT THE RTG HAD GOTTEN ITSELF INTO A FIX ON THE THREE DETENTION CENTERS LOCATED AT NAKHON PHANOM, BURIRAM, AND MAE JAN. IN ANTICIPATION OF AN EMERGENCY BUDGET AUTHORIZATION WITHIN TEN DYAS, THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR (MOI) BORROWED FUNDS THAT THE UNHCR ALLOCATED TO MOI FOR REFUGEE CARE. THEY USED THE MONEY TO PAY CONTRACTORS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TWO CENTERS AT NAKHON PHANOM AND MAE JAN. THE CABINET THEN TURNED DOWN THE BUDGET REQUEST. THE UNHCR HAD SUBSEQUENTLY INFORMED MOI THAT IT WOULD PAY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION AND UPKEEP OF THESE CAMPS IF THE RTG ACCEPTED THE REFUGEES THERE IN THE SAME FASHION AS THOSE IN THE OTHER UNHCR-SUPPORTED CAMPS IN THAILAND. IN OTHER WORDS, THE RTG WOULD HAVE TO RENOUNCE ITS INTENTION, HOWEVER EVENTUAL, OF REPATRIATING THE REFUGEES. THE UNHCR EXPECTED A FAVORABLE REPLY.
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5. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED ABOUT GOODYEAR'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY INTERNATIONAL (FHI) RESETTLEMENT SCHEME FOR HMONG REFUGEES IN BOLIVIA. GOODYEAR SAID THAT THE UNHCR DID NOT WANT TO BE THE BOOGEYMAN ON THIS ISSUE AND WAS MAINTAINING AN OPEN MIND. HIS OWN VIEW WAS THAT FHI WAS BETTER AT PUBLICITY AND FUND RAISING THAN CARRYING OUT SUSTAINED PROGRAMS. HE RECALLED THAT THE UNHCR WAS NOW PICKING UP THE PIECES OF EARLIER WELL-MEANING SOUTH AMERICAN REFUGEE PROGRAMS, DATING FROM THE EARLY 50'S. GOODYEAR NEVERTHELESS HOPES THAT FHI WILL PROVE HIM WRONG ON THIS ISSUE AND THAT THE RESETTLEMENT EFFORT IS SUCCESSFUL, EVEN IF ONLY FOR A FEW HUNDRED.

6. GOODYEAR SAID THAT HIGH COMMISSIONER POUL HARTLING WOULD PROBABLY VISIT THAILAND IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, JUST IN ADVANCE OF THE UNHCR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING AND THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY OPENING. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED WHY HE HAD NOT COME EARLIER. GOODYEAR POINTED OUT THAT THERE HAD BEEN THE POSSIBILITY OF A STOPOVER ON THE WAY BACK FROM AUSTRALIA A FEW MONTHS PREVIOUSLY, BUT THAT

THE REFUGEE PICTURE IN THAILAND WAS MURKY THEN. HARTLING WOULD HAVE BEEN ASKED TO COMMIT HIMSELF ON SEVERAL ISSUES FOR WHICH HE MAY NOT HAVE BEEN PREPARED. GOOD-YEAR'S OFFICE THEREFORE DISCOURAGED THE VISIT AT THAT TIME.

7. COMMENT: WHILE GOODYEAR'S OPTIMISM ABOUT THE CURRENT RELATIVE RELAXATION OF THE RTG OVER THE REFUGEE SITUATION IS NOT INCORRECT, THAI ATTITUDES TOWARD REFUGEES SWING WITH THE PENDULUM. THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT, THE STEPPED-UP PACE OF DEPARTURES FOR THE UNITED STATES, AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW AUSTRALIAN AND AMERICAN PROGRAMS HAVE ALL CONTRIBUTED TO THIS MOOD. HOW LONG THE MOOD WILL PREVAIL IS QUESTIONABLE. THE EXTREMELY HIGH
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BOAT REFUGEE ARRIVAL FIGURES IN MALAYSIA AND THAILAND DURING APRIL AND MAY COULD PRODUCE A HARDENING ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF BOTH COUNTRIES, IF A HIGH OUTWARD FLOW OF REFUGEES IS NOT SUSTAINED IN THE COMING MONTHS.
WHITEHOUSE

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